

Providing a supporting statement

1. Hello. My name is Eileen Hyder. I'm part of the team in CQSD and I manage the FLAIR CPD Scheme. This screencast is one of several we've put together on different aspects of applying for Fellowship through the Scheme. One aspect of every Fellowship application is the requirement to provide supporting statements. These statements (which are essentially a type of reference) are somewhat different to other types of references that people write so we thought it might be useful to make a screencast covering some of the questions we tend to get asked about supporting statements.
2. The first thing that people tend to ask is what the statement is for. They want to be sure that what they write will do the job. Essentially the supporting statement serves three main purposes. Firstly it acts as confirmation that what the applicant has said in the application – the things they say they've done and the impact they say they've had - is an accurate and fair representation of their work. So one purpose of the supporting statement is to be validation of the claims being made.

It would be difficult, if not impossible, to fulfil that purpose unless the supporting statement was based on real knowledge of the applicant's practice. Unless the person writing the statement has first-hand knowledge and experience of the applicant's work, then the statement wouldn't have any credibility – so another way of thinking about the purpose of the supporting statement is as peer review of the applicant's practice.

And another purpose it serves is to confirm that the applicant meets the expectations of the category of Fellowship they are applying for. Each category of Fellowship has specific characteristics and expectations. These are set down in a document called *The Professional Standards Framework*. There are links to the *Framework* and a screencast introducing the *Framework* on our website. It's really important that the people providing the statements are familiar with the *Framework* as otherwise their statement might not fulfil the purpose of confirming that it would be appropriate to award this category of Fellowship to this applicant. For example, someone might be carrying out excellent research but Fellowship is an award for teaching and learning, not research. If the person providing the supporting statement focuses on the applicant's research, it won't support the applicant's claim that they deserve a teaching and learning award. But if you remember that the purpose of what you're writing is to confirm the claims that the applicant is making, then nothing should go wrong. The applicant should be very tuned into the expectations and criteria and they should have framed their application accordingly – if you keep to your purpose of confirming what they've claimed (which should be aligned to expectations) then what you write should fit the bill perfectly.

3. Another thing applicants can get anxious about is who they should ask to provide their statements. The answer to that is very simple. As I've already said, whoever supplies the supporting statement must be able to confirm the claims made in the application. So if the applicant asks me, 'Does the person providing the supporting statement have to have Fellowship themselves?' – I say, 'As long as they can support the claims you make in your application, then they're perfect.' And if they ask, 'Do they have to work at Reading or can they be external to the institution?' – I say, 'As long as they can support the claims you make in your application, then they're perfect.' Whatever the question, that's essentially the answer.

So let's think about what that actually means. It brings us back to the fact that you couldn't realistically confirm the claims unless you had first-hand experience of the applicant's work. As I've already said, without first-hand experience your supporting statement has no credibility.

So, in terms of whether or not you're the right person to provide a supporting statement, if you can answer 'yes' to the questions on this slide, then you're an ideal person to supply a supporting statement.

4. Despite the fact that I'm like a broken record in explaining who's appropriate and although it's all explained clearly in the handbooks, there are still some myths around who can and can't be referees. Some people seem to think the referee must be someone internal. I've just explained that that's not the case – it's one of the myths about the Scheme. It's true that we do expect one of the supporting statements to come from someone at Reading but not both - and that makes sense when you remember that the purpose of the supporting statement is to confirm the claim. If someone writes about designing a placement, then the best person to confirm what happened and the impact of the placement might well be someone from the placement setting. Insisting on a statement from someone at Reading would be counter-productive in that situation as someone at Reading might not have the same insight or be able to provide examples of what was done and the impact it had as someone who was involved locally where the placement happened. So if you've been asked to write a supporting statement and you're external to the institution, then, as long as you could answer 'yes' to the questions on the previous slide, then you're fine.

There also seems to be a myth that the people who provide the statements have to have Fellowship themselves. In an ideal world they would. If you remember the supporting statement has to confirm eligibility for the category of Fellowship the applicant is applying for and be aligned to the PSF – so the person who writes it needs to be familiar with those things and you can imagine that's probably easier for someone whose applied for Fellowship themselves. But as long as the person who writes the statement is prepared to look at the PSF and familiarise themselves with the expectations of the category of Fellowship being applied for so that they can align the supporting statement to the PSF, and confidently confirm the applicant's eligibility, then it will be fine. It is not a requirement that they have Fellowship themselves.

5. The next thing you probably want to know is what's involved in writing a supporting statement and that's explained on this slide. The applicant should send you everything you need but we'd also recommend looking at the website as there are useful things there. We've put together some guidance notes for writing supporting statements, the participant handbook also has some information, and there's a whole section about the PSF on the website including some screencasts and links to Advance HE guidance if you need to familiarise or refamiliarise yourself with those.

Remembering that your role is to confirm the claims made in the application, then the next step has to be to read the application. Without doing that you can't know what the applicant is claiming in terms of things they've done and impact they've had. Most people are involved in far more work than they actually include in their application. It would be no good if you write about an aspect of work that's not in the application. Your role isn't to provide additional detail – if you do that it will be disregarded as that's not what the supporting

statements are for. So read the application carefully and make sure that the examples you give link to what the applicant has chosen to build their claim around.

You should then download the proforma from the website. We expect all supporting statements to be on this proforma. The first section of the proforma is a series of boxes – some general information and some declarations. Make sure you've completed all of the boxes on page one of the proforma. It would be disappointing if the application was returned to the applicant for something small that was missing.

And then you need to write the statement. It only needs to be around 500 words but this is an indicative word count so don't worry if you find you write more. Within your statement you need to give some concrete examples of what the applicant has done and the impact they have had. I'm going to show you some illustrative examples in a moment so we'll come back to this then.

Next you need to align the statement to the PSF

6. This is an example of what that involves. Under the space where you paste in your statement is a box like this where you're asked to indicate which aspects of the PSF you are providing evidence of. For example, A3 is part of this list – so we can assume the statement is confirming some aspect of the applicant's practice in relation to assessment and feedback. And K4 is listed so we can assume that there's some reference to how the applicant uses technology. And V1 is listed so we can assume the statement contains something on how the applicant makes their practice inclusive and accessible. It really is as simple as looking at the Dimensions and listing which ones you've made references to in your statement
7. Once you've done that, the last thing you do is sign and date the statement and then return it to the applicant. I'm afraid we can't accept typed signatures but we can accept electronic signatures. Some people query the fact that the statement is sent directly to the applicant but that is Advance HE practice and we mirror that. The applicant is responsible for submitting all the elements of the application so, once they receive it from you, they have to embed it within their application. It's usually easier for them if you send it as a Word document rather than a PDF as PDFs can be difficult to paste onto the application proforma.
8. I said I'd show you some illustrative examples of the type of thing someone might write in a supporting statement. This paragraph is typical of what you might find in a supporting statement for D1 or D2. Because this refers to peer observation we immediately know that the person writing the statement has first-hand knowledge of the applicant's practice. There are then several concrete examples of what this person observed the applicant doing that they considered examples of good practice and finally there's a sense of positive impact on students. That paragraph is 87 words long so you can see that, even within 500 words, you could give quite a lot of detail.
9. This paragraph is an example of what you might write if you're providing a supporting statement for Senior Fellowship. You can see this person has started by making really clear that he or she understands the expectations of this type of application. Again this statement is followed by some concrete examples of what the applicant has done and at the end it draws out that the applicant's impact has been to support colleagues to ensure that all

assessment briefs and marking criteria are easily accessible to students. This paragraph is 129 words, so longer than the previous example, but you can see that you could still provide a number of specific examples within 500 words. And I hope you'll also see that both of these examples do an excellent job of fulfilling the three functions of the supporting statements we discussed at the start of this screencast: they show first-hand knowledge of the applicant's work; they show understanding of the expectations so are useful as confirmation that it would be appropriate to award this category of Fellowship to this applicant, and they give specific examples (not just generic, descriptive detail) about what the applicant has done and the impact they have had. We have to assume, of course, that the applicant must have written about how they deliver lectures or how they have supported colleagues in terms of assessment and feedback or these statements would not be useful.

I hope you've found this screencast useful. If you have any questions about writing a statement, then do get in touch. Our contact details are on the website and in our documentation.